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mark the New Year, the time of harvest, All Saints' Day, or Easter can be given; on the other hand, the accounts of those portions of the agricultural cycle that take place during the rainy season, especially the operations of the important co-operative work-groups, could be followed carefully. In the field of religion, good fortune and a friendly entrée, the harvest of many months spent in field-work among Negro peoples elsewhere, but above all in Guinée — Africa — afforded invitations to a number of private ceremonies that might occur at any season. And the same background, together with the insatiable interest of the Negro in the nature and the functioning of his gods, made for such detailed discussions of native theological concept and philosophical point of view as could not have been bettered no matter what the time of year.

In the field, the procedure followed in earlier investigations was continued; a house was found in the village where it was possible to settle down and quietly observe life as it drifted past the door. A number of acquaintances became habitual visitors, and these, together with those others whose services as interpreters were needed, especially in the early days of the stay when the understanding of Créole and the ability to converse in it were limited, constituted those to whom questions were most frequently put or to whom happenings that had been observed were referred for clarification. Agreement on all points, or any point, in fact, bearing either on belief or ritual observance was by no means invariably found, but soundness of method in the study of culture must recognize that there are no "correct" answers to questions of custom; and that the acceptance of the fact of individual differences of behavior and point of view within the general framework of a given set of traditions is the only valid approach to the realities of human civilization.

Obviously, not all the material presented here is the result of first-hand observation, for much insight can be derived from the method of question and answer when carefully used

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123 with a native resident of the locality that is being studied. A
124 great deal was observed, but observation is at best a matter of chance, as, for example, in the matter of birth-customs, which were not witnessed because no birth occurred in a family with whom close relations had been established, as against the ritual of death, where information was checked through observation when a death occurred in the family of friends. If observation alone were relied upon for authentic information, no rounded picture of any culture could be achieved much short of a lifetime of effort. It is entirely possible for an ethnographer who is conversant with the outlines of the culture of a given society to check statements made to him against their probability in terms of the inner logic of the culture he is studying; it is even a simpler matter to obtain independent statements concerning the same facet of behavior and to discover whether, allowing for variations within the logic of the culture, a given explanation or description of a certain custom is to be accepted as valid. There is no question that suspicion or misunderstanding of purpose is the cause of the passing on of much misinformation; but it is remarkable how often, if the student knows patience and does not attempt to probe the most secret phases of a culture during the initial period of his stay, a misleading or evasive explanation given in the early days will later be corrected voluntarily as "a mistake."

123 Much nonsense has been written about the need for the student of the customs of a people to become a "participant observer" of those customs, by doing what, in common parlance, is termed "going native." This may be feasible among some folk — in the South Seas, perhaps — but let it be stated emphatically that this is neither possible nor of benefit among West African Negroes and their New World Negro descendants. There is no tradition that is more deeply shared among them than that of the importance of valuing individual ide-